



## Two nests of Nahan's Francolin in the Budongo Forest Reserve, Uganda

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Nahan's Francolin *Francolinus nabhani* has only been recorded from north-east Zaire and west and south-central Uganda. Collar et al<sup>1</sup> classify this species as being of 'indeterminate status' because it is so poorly known. One of the three forests in Uganda where it has been recorded in the past is the Budongo Forest Reserve in the west of the country (Keith et al<sup>2</sup>).

This forest has been managed for timber on a sustainable yield basis since the mid 1920s and the effect this has had on the forest and its wildlife forms the subject of a long-term research programme, the Budongo Forest Project. Part of the research has involved intensive mist-netting in different parts of the forest which has turned up a new record for East Africa, Puvél's Illadopsis *Illadopsis puvéli* (A J Plumptre and I Owijunji in prep). Notes have been kept on any certain sightings of Nahan's Francolin for the past six months using the colour of the legs (red) to distinguish this species from the other francolin in Budongo, Latham's Forest Francolin *F. lathamii* (yellow legs). Nahan's Francolin appears to be fairly common in this forest and can often be heard calling between 07.30 and 08.30 hr as it appears to be highly territorial. The call is difficult to describe but consists of a fluid build

up of pairs of notes that gradually rise in frequency and gradually increase in volume. A single call can last about 7–10 seconds. Sightings are usually of pairs of birds but groups of up to seven individuals have been seen (possibly parents and mature offspring).



Nest of Nahan's Francolin *Francolinus nabhani*, Budongo Forest Reserve, Uganda, 1995. (Andrew J. Plumptre)  
*Nid du Francolin de Nabani* *Francolinus nabhani*, Réserve forestière de Budongo, Ouganda, 1995 (Andrew J. Plumptre)



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We have caught one bird in mist-nets by chasing it into the net (other birds have been observed to walk up to the net and go around it upon seeing it). This individual was completing its moult from juvenile plumage and was in a group of about seven birds. In addition two nests have been found. The nest of this bird has only been recorded once before (Keith et al<sup>2</sup>) and was observed in the hollow of a tree trunk about 1 m above the ground. Both of the nests were on the ground between the buttresses of trees behind a few vine stems or roots from epiphytic plants. The eggs were pinkish with faint brown/purple speckling. One nest contained four eggs and the other contained three. The first nest was discovered on 15 August 1995 and the four hatched about five days later. The second bird was found laying its eggs on 14 October 1995 but unfortunately the nest was destroyed by a predator on

27 October. The adult bird in both cases would freeze on the nest and could easily be missed because of the speckled patterning of the plumage merging with the leaf-litter.

It is possible that this species could be censused using playbacks of its call as it always seems to respond to calls from other individuals. It is commonly heard in areas where the understorey is fairly dense between 1–4 m above the ground making it difficult to see the bird unless another one calling attracts it out. There also seem to be higher numbers in swampy areas but this is only a subjective impression. As this dense understorey vegetation tends to occur where logging has taken place it is not thought that the current logging would be very detrimental to this species. It is hoped that funds can be raised to employ

a Ugandan researcher to try to census this species in Budongo Forest and to collect data on its habitat requirements, possibly by employing radiotracking techniques.

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## References

1. Collar, N.J., Crosby, M.J. and Stattersfield, A.J. 1994. *Birds to watch 2: the world list of threatened birds*. Cambridge: BirdLife International.
2. Keith, S., Urban, E.K. and Fry, C.H. (eds) 1986. *The Birds of Africa: Volume 2*. London: Academic Press.

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## Note on the field identification of Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes neglectus*

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Following some apparently anomalous observations in the East Usambaras, Tanzania, I examined skins of *Anthreptes* sunbirds in the Natural History Museum Bird Section at Tring, Hertfordshire, UK. This showed that the immature plumage of Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes neglectus* is misleadingly described by Moreau and Moreau<sup>4</sup> and Mackworth-Praed and Grant<sup>3</sup>. The latter represents the only widely available and otherwise reliable guide to identifying this species, which is restricted to the forests of East Africa.

Immature *neglectus* can show a bold white supercilium running from the lores to at least 5 mm behind the eye. This is present on both the immature females and one of the two immature males in the collection. Also, the iridescent feathers (which cover the upperparts of adults of both sexes) can be limited to the upper tail coverts, tail and bend of the wing of immature birds. These two features would traditionally be considered to indicate a female or immature of either Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird *A. orientalis* or Violet-backed Sunbird *A. longuemarei*.

I twice saw individuals showing these features in the East Usambaras in 1994. Since they were not begging for food from the accompanying adult *neglectus* and did not have prominent pale gape lines, I did not initially suspect that they were immatures. The habitat, range and other plumage features suggest that they were *neglectus*, as does the fact that

*neglectus* occurred commonly at the site. However, as discussed below, it can be virtually impossible to identify such individuals with confidence.

The three species are largely allopatric, with their ranges and habitat requirements well defined, at least in East Africa<sup>1</sup>. Nonetheless it would be preferable to rely on plumage features, since identifications based solely on range or habitat may lead to the loss of interesting extra-limital records and conceal cases of sympatry or unusual habitat choice. They are also considered unacceptable by committees vetting records of rarities.

Several features remain for separating those immature *neglectus* showing a supercilium from females and immatures of the two confusion species. As far as I can determine, none is reliable for all individuals of all species. All are difficult to assess on these small, active arboreal birds. Many individuals with this type of plumage will be impossible to identify with certainty in the field, and perhaps even in the hand, without considering range. Eliminating the form *A. longuemarei angolensis* is the most difficult aspect.

The features are given below:

1. Immature *neglectus* and immature or female *longuemarei* are bright lemon-yellow on the belly and vent. Female and young *orientalis* show at most a faint yellow or buff wash. This should make it easy to eliminate *orientalis* given good views.